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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: January 25, 2008

BZOe Demands an End to Immigration into Austria

11. Right-wing opposition party BZOe leader Peter Westenthaler has called for an end to immigration to Austria. He made an exception, though, for needed skilled workers, who should be allowed into Austria as holders of "green-card"-type permits similar to those used in the USA and Canada. Westenthaler emphasized, however, that even such skilled workers should be able to speak German well, be well-educated and have a desire to be integrated, in order to be allowed into the country. Semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung reports that BZOe leader Peter Westenthaler has proposed to restrict immigration to Austria to needed skilled workers willing to integrate. Westenthaler added that foreign ghettos similar to those that he claimed existed in many areas of Vienna were unacceptable. Foreigners who refused to integrate into Austrian society, he said, should be deported. Furthermore, the BZOe leader dismissed the claim made in the Interior Ministry's recently published Integration Report that providing housing subsidies to immigrants would help prevent the formation of foreign ghettos. Such subsidies should be reserved for Austrians, he said. The daily also quotes Westenthaler as calling for more pressure on immigrants to integrate. He cited language classes for pre-school children and their family members as one means of doing so. Another means, he added, would be what he called "professional schooling" for immigrants that would acquaint them with their rights and duties as well as relevant provisions of Austrian laws. According to the BZOe boss, such education would help immigrants, who often found themselves lost in "bureaucratic jungles." Meanwhile, the Freedom Party (FPOe) has called the Interior Ministry's Integration Report "grossly negligent," since Austria -- according to the party -- was being "inundated by immigrants" from different cultures, whose numbers "exceed the acceptable." The FPOe has demanded the deportation of long-term unemployed immigrants, foreigners opposed to integration and criminal immigrants. Freedom Party leader Heinz-Christian Strache claimed that the sixteen per cent of Austrian residents with foreign backgrounds had created "parallel societies" that had left many native-born Austrians disgruntled.

Economic Chamber Calls for Lower Interest Rates

12. Austrian Economic Chamber (WKoe) President Christoph Leitl has called on the European Central Bank (ECB) to lower interest rates by 0.5 percent. Leitl criticized that ECB President Jean-Claude Trichet had been passive in the face of the worldwide financial crisis and demanded the formulation of a common European economic policy. The WKoe President argued that the "Americans are trying to dump the junk that they created on us. And we Europeans are simply standing

on the sidelines and watching them." According to Leitl, the ECB had been negligent on the issues of price stability and economic growth. ORF radio in its noon news report Mittagsjournal on Thursday quoted Austrian Economic Chamber (WKOe) President Christoph Leitl as calling on the European Central Bank (ECB) to lower interest rates by half a percentage point. Criticizing ECB President Jean-Claude Trichet of having been "passive in the face of the worldwide financial crisis," Leitl complained that the ECB boss "has merely been sitting in the spectator's box," at a time when he should have been "playing an active role." Regarding the issue of the new EU climate-protection package, Leitl dismissed concerns that jobs might be lost through its implementation, ORF radio continued. The WKOe President also called for incentives for businesses that operated in an environmentally-friendly manner and for penalties for those engaged in production on the basis of poor standards. It appears somewhat doubtful, however, that the ECB will heed Leitl's call for lower interest rates, Austrian media suggest. Trichet has told MEPs in Brussels that the bank will not lower interest rates because of the continued danger of runaway inflation.

Plan to Stimulate US Economy

13. Congressional leaders in the United States have agreed on a 150-billion-dollar rescue package to stimulate the ailing US economy. More than 100 million families will benefit under the plan, which also includes incentives for business. President George Bush had called for a growth package that could be implemented quickly, after fears of a looming American recession contributed to turmoil on the international financial markets. The Bush administration is hopeful the rescue package will lead to higher consumer spending and increased business investment this year. ORF radio early morning news Morgenjournal quotes US President George Bush as commenting on the 150-billion-dollar rescue package to stimulate the ailing US economy: "This package has the right set of policies, the right size. The incentives in this package will lead to higher consumer spending and increased business investment this year. The borderline of this package recognizes that lowering taxes is a powerful and efficient way to help consumers and businesses. I've always believed that allowing people to keep more of their own money and use it as they see fit is the best way to help our economy grow." In addition, Democratic speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi welcomed the agreement, saying this was a "remarkable package because it is about putting money in the hand of America's working families. It is there to strengthen the middle class, to create jobs and to turn this economy around and that is what is important about it. It is timely, it is targeted, and it is temporary," ORF radio quotes Pelosi.

Meanwhile, independent provincial daily Salzburger Nachrichten reports that despite the concerns over a potential economic recession in the United States, Austrian companies exporting to the US are confident there is "no reason for panic." The majority of exporters are confident that their reliance on "niche products" is making them almost independent from the stock markets' ups and downs, the daily says. Walter Koren, the head of the Economic Chamber's international business office, also does not believe that the significance of the United States for Austrian exporters will change or suffer.

Prodi Resigns

14. Italy's Prime Minister Romano Prodi has handed in his resignation to President Giorgio Napolitano, after losing a vote of confidence in his coalition government in the Italian Senate, the Upper House of Parliament. Prodi will continue as head of government until a successor is found. President Napolitano may now call early elections. He is also expected to push for much-needed electoral reforms, given that under the current system smaller parties with only a handful of seats can hold the balance of power in Parliament - a factor that also caused the current crisis. Like all Austrian media, independent provincial daily Salzburger Nachrichten reports on the current government crisis in Italy, where Premier Romano Prodi handed in his resignation, after he lost a vote of confidence in his coalition government in the Italian Senate. The daily says that Prodi chose to face the Senate vote despite the government's hopeless situation and against the advice of President Giorgio Napolitano. It must have been the Premier's "longest day," the

Salzburger Nachrichten suggests, pointing out that Prodi, the "stubborn fighter," would not be deterred by the inevitable outcome of the vote. Centrist daily Die Presse says that yesterday's developments thus marked the "turbulent end of the 61st Italian government since the end of WWII." Prodi's willingness to "fight was to no avail," the daily continues: The "Senators in Rome killed off his coalition government after a mere 20 months."

NYT Endorses Clinton, McCain

15. The US daily newspaper New York Times has endorsed Democratic Senator Hillary Clinton and Republican Senator John McCain for their parties' nomination in the US presidential election in November. The paper emphasized Senator Clinton's experience. The move comes ahead of the next two important rounds in the race for the White House: the Democratic primary in South Carolina on Saturday, and the Florida primary on January 29, where presidential hopefuls from both parties are going to compete. Reporting on the US presidential election process, Washington correspondent for centrist daily Die Presse Norbert Rief headlines "[Bill] Clinton takes on the Doberman role." The former President has launched "harsh attacks against presidential hopeful Barack Obama," a fact that "has left the Democrats concerned." The "competition between Hillary Clinton and her rival Obama has taken on a spiteful note, and Hillary's husband Bill has taken on the role of the Doberman." Many Democrats are not happy with this development, arguing that such behavior should be beneath a former US President, Rief says. Thus, prominent Democrats have urged Mr. Clinton to show moderation, as his verbal attacks threatened not only to damage his wife's campaign, but the entire party's reputation. Meanwhile, mass-circulation daily Kurier, looking to the upcoming South Carolina primary, says that in the "Democratic primary election battle contestants Clinton and Obama are vying for the votes of the African Americans -- with undisguised attacks and tricky statements" that could in an interview with the daily, US political analyst David Bosits underscored that African Americans in particular "want change in US politics."

Kosovo Independence "Matter Of Days"

16. The Prime Minister and the President of Kosovo have announced the Serbian province will declare independence from Belgrade very soon. Independence was a "matter of days," Premier Hashim Thaci said during a visit to Brussels recently. He added that he is hoping for "massive support from the United States and from Europe," but some EU states, like Greece, have said they would prefer more negotiations on Kosovo's future status. The closer the date of Kosovo's declaration of its independence from Serbia is, the more hectic the EU's crisis diplomacy becomes, mass-circulation daily Kurier comments.
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